

Characteristics of jail inmates

Demographics

- Women were 12% of the local jail inmates in 2002, up from 10% in 1996.
- Jail inmates were older on average in 2002 than 1996: 38% were age 35 or older, up from 32% in 1996.
- More than 6 in 10 persons in local jails in 2002 were racial or ethnic minorities, unchanged from 1996.
- An estimated 40% were black; 19%, Hispanic, 1% American Indian; 1% Asian; and 3% of more than one race/ethnicity.

Conviction Offense

- Half of jail inmates in 2002 were held for a violent or drug offense, almost unchanged from 1996.
- Drug offenders, up 37%, represented the largest source of jail population growth between 1996 and 2002.
- More than two-thirds of the growth in inmates held in local jails for drug law violations was due to an increase in persons charged with drug trafficking.
- Thirty-seven percent of jail inmates were convicted on a new charge; 18% were convicted on prior charges following revocation of probation or parole; 16% were both convicted of a prior charge and awaiting trial on a new charge; and 28% were unconvicted.

Criminal History

- Fifty-three percent of jail inmates were on probation, parole or pretrial release at the time of arrest.
- Four in 10 jail inmates had a current or past sentence for a violent offense.
- Thirty-nine percent of jail inmates in 2002 had served 3 or more prior sentences to incarceration or probation, down from 44% in 1996.

Substance Use and Treatment

- Half (50%) of convicted jail inmates were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the offense, down from 59% in 1996.
- Three out of every four convicted jail inmates were alcohol or drugs-involved at the time of their current offense.
- Alcohol use at the time of the offense dropped from 41% (1996) to 35% (2002), while drug use dropped from 35% to 29%.
- Average sentence length of inmates serving their time in a local jail increased from 22 months in 1996 to 24 months in 2002.
- Time expected to be served in jail dropped from 10 months in 1996 to 9 months, in 2002

Family background

- Thirty-one percent of jail inmates had grown up with a parent or guardian who abused alcohol or drugs
- About 12 percent had lived in a foster home or institution.
- Forty-six percent had a family member who had been incarcerated.
- More than 50% of the women in jail said they had been physically or sexually abused in the past, compared to more than 10% of the men.